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ABSTRACT

In developing programs to foster purposive social change, it is imperative that program planners receive information regarding the perceptions of those in key positions and the general public concerning the major problems or issues facing a county. This report assesses the characteristics of leaders from several North Carolina counties in regard to these perceptions, also comparing them with those of the general public. Responses for Section 1 (Community leader characteristics) were received from 511 community leaders in seven counties. At the same time, January 1973, a statewide survey of the State's general public determined their perceptions of community problems, which are compared with the community leaders' perceptions in Section 2. Section 3 deals with the implications drawn from the first two sections. The seven participating counties were self-selected, including one metropolitan (formerly rural), two metropolitan fringe, and four, rural. The study examined approximately 40 typical problems, such as education, public facilities, economic development, health, long range community planning, housing, and recreation. The varying importance to these different areas by the general public and the leaders may indicate that education and information programs are needed to make leadership, as well as the public at large, aware of the scope of the planning problem and the implications that may flow from the lack of planning. (KM)

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COMMUNITY LEADER CHARACTERISTICS, PROBLEM PERCEPTION AND PURPOSIVE SOCIAL CHANGE: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER*

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In developing programs to foster purposive social change, it is imperative that program planners receive adequate information. Such information should assess both the social and cultural setting in which the change is to be implemented and those key position incumbents who affect the possibility of change being implemented. In addition, it is important that the program planners have information available to them regarding the perceptions of those in key positions and the general public concerning the major problems or issues facing a county.

The following report will assess the characteristics of leaders from several North Carolina counties in regard to their perception of problems facing their counties. The problem perception of these leaders will be compared with that of the general public who were surveyed during the same time period.

In January 1973, the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service launched "Project OVERVIEW", a leader and problem identification survey. The focus of Project OVERVIEW is to gain additional information concerning the leadership structure of a county and to identify current problems or issues facing that county. After the initial announcement and description of Project OVERVIEW, County Extension staffs were asked to volunteer to participate in the effort. Data reported in Section I below were assembled from "mail back"

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questionnaires left with community leaders following an interview by a member of the local Extension Staff or a member of the U.S.D.A. Rural Development Panel. Responses from 511 community leaders in seven counties will be reported in this section. This represents a response rate of over 75% for all community leaders who were interviewed.

At the same time, plans were being implemented for a statewide survey of a 1/1000 sample of the general public in North Carolina to determine their perception of community problems. This latter study was conducted via mail questionnaire with a final response rate of 70%, or 3115 useable responses.

This report will include three sections. Section I will deal with a review of community leader characteristics in the seven North Carolina counties; Section II with a comparison of the perception of community problems by community leaders and the general public; and Section III with implications drawn from this information for the planning of purposive social change.

SECTION I

Community Leader Characteristics

As indicated earlier, the participating counties were self-selected. Those being discussed in this paper were the first to volunteer for the Project in their respective Extension Districts. Consequently, the sample is not necessarily representative of the state. However, they do represent in large part the general economic base and locational phenomenon of the state. For purposes of reporting, the data will be presented for the metropolitan county; the two metropolitan fringe counties and the remaining four rural counties.

Metropolitan County

Until its recent designation as a part of the Charlotte SMSA, Gaston County met all the criteria for a rural county as defined by the Rural Development Act of 1972. However, with its entrance into the SMSA, it has lost this distinction. Granted, it is a very densely settled rural county with a number of small to medium sized towns, but for the most part is a densely populated rural area. It is located immediately to the west of Charlotte and had a population of 148,415 in 1970. Being the historic seat of the textile industry in the southeast, it has been a highly industrialized rural area for over 100 years. The first cotton mills opened in the 1840's and today still forms the backbone of the economy, along with the manufacture of textile machinery, and a trucking industry that has met the transportation requirements of the textile based economy. Commercial agriculture has never provided a livelihood for large numbers of Gaston County residents, with the pattern tending towards small farms where one or more of the family members were employed in a nearby mill.

Metropolitan Fringe Counties

Two of the counties reported here are located on the metropolitan fringe. Granville, with 1970 population of 32,762, is located on the Virginia border just to the north of Durham and Raleigh. This county has a history of relatively large farms and agriculture still forms a significant portion of the economic backbone. However, in recent years a number of small manufacturing plants have been located in the county, several large governmental institutions have been located on an abandoned military complex, and improved roads have made the Raleigh-Durham labor market accessible to old time ib residents and to new residents fleeing these urban centers for residential

purposes. Pender is the other metropolitan fringe county with a 1970 population of 18,149. Located in southeastern North Carolina and bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the south by the Wilmington metropolitan area, its economic backbone is still agriculture and fishing. However, most of the labor force that is not employed in agriculture must travel beyond county lines to gain a livelihood - at a nearby military complex, or in one of the many industries of the Wilmington area.

Rural Counties

Three of the four rural counties reported here are border counties. Hertford and Surry are located on the Virginia border. Hertford is about 50 miles south of the Norfolk metropolitan area while Surry is located on the eastern slope of the Appalachian mountains, about 50 miles north of the Winston-Salem metropolitan area. Macon county is located on the Georgia border in the midst of the North Carolina mountains and is about 125 miles directly north of Atlanta. Moore county is in the center of the Sandhills section about 50 miles south of Raleigh and is best known as the site of some of the finest golf courses on the continent.

All four of these counties are heavily dependent on agriculture for their economic base along with manufacturing and tourism. In 1970 the population for these counties was as follows: Hertford - 23,529; Macon - 15,788; Moore - 39,048; and Surry - 51,415.

The Data: Age

Age of the respondents varied from under 30 to well over 60. For purposes of reporting here the ages have been grouped into ten-year age spans.

TABLE I

Age of North Carolina Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Under 30 %	30-39 %	40-49 %	50-59 %	60 & Over %	N.R. %
Gaston	2	14	42	28	11	3
Granville	3	10	26	33	28	1
Pender	3	17	34	27	19	0
Hertford	3	23	28	35	11	0
Macon	4	35	24	22	15	0
Moore	2	12	38	33	15	0
Surry	6	19	33	22	20	0
All Counties	3	19	32	28	18	0

The median age for the group reported above would be in the high 40's. Those leaders reporting from Gaston tend to be somewhat younger, with their median age falling in the low 40's. Granville County leaders with a median age in their low 50's represent the oldest group for reporting counties.

Length of Residence

While it would be anticipated that age and length of residence would be highly correlated, our current analysis does not allow us to speak to this point, However, it is interesting to note that two of the rural counties had the highest proportion of their responding leaders as relatively new residents: Macon with 33% and Moore with 25%. It is also interesting to note that the two metropolitan fringe counties had the highest proportion of responding leaders who were long time residents: Granville with 46% and Pender with 40%.

TABLE II

Length of Residence In County (years) of North Carolina Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Under 10 %	10-19 %	20-29 %	30-39 %	40 & Over %	N.R. %
Gaston	16	21	7	21	35	
Granville	14	7	17	16	46	1
Pender	19	8	24	9	40	
Hertford	17	20	22	16	25	
Macon	33	7	17	21	22	
Moore	25	14	17	6	38	
Surry	18	17	12	15	38	
All Counties	20	13	16	16	35	

Education

While the mean educational attainment for all North Carolina residents age 25 and over was 10.6 in 1970, the group of community leaders responding in this study represented a significantly higher educational attainment.

Some 60% reported having completed college or gone beyond. Another 23% indicated some training beyond high school, including vocational - technical education or some college.

Still another 11% completed high school. This leaves only 6% of the respondents who were near or below the mean educational attainment for North Carolina adults.

TABLE III

Educational Attainment of North Carolina
Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Some Grade School %	Completed Grade School %	Some High School %	Completed High School %	Trade or Voc. School %	Some College %	Completed College %	Some Grad. Work %	A Graduate Degree %	No Response %
Gaston	0	0	1	6	3	21	23	14	32	0
Granville	2	2	6	12	1	24	21	7	25	1
Pender	2	0	3	16	3	24	13	3	36	0
Hertford	0	2	2	11	3	12	19	25	26	0
Macon	0	1	7	12	5	20	20	14	20	1
Moore	0	0	4	10	2	17	21	10	36	0
Surry	2	0	3	16	3	24	13	3	36	0
All Counties	1	1	4	11	4	19	19	13	28	0

While 41% of all respondents reported training beyond the baccalaureate, a higher proportion of respondents from Gaston (46%), Hertford (51%) and Moore (46%) than from other counties indicated post baccalaureate training.

Occupation

In his 1968 book, Community Structure and Decision Making, Terry Clark summarized a number of the studies done on community influentials in the past. In his summary of ten studies he found that the distribution of influentials among occupational groups were as follows:[1]

[1]Clark, Terry. Community Structure and Decision Making. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968 Pp 324

	(Percent)
Business	52
Government	13
Independent Professions	10
Education	5
Communication	5
Labor	4
Religion	4
Welfare and cultural (Civic Leaders)	4
Society and Wealth	3
Agriculture	1

While the studies reported by Clark represent information gathered in relatively large urban settings, it must be remembered that the data in this case come primarily from relatively rural areas. While our data is not presently coded so that it is completely consistent with Clark's coding scheme, there is a good bit of similarity between the two schemes. Because of their importance to Extension programming activities, we have identified leaders of youth programs, homemakers who have no additional occupational identification, and a group that is retired.

TABLE IV

Occupation of North Carolina Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Business & Industry %	Education %	Gov't & Politics %	Health & Welfare %	Religion %	Youth Programs %	Homemaker %	Farmer %	Retired %
Gaston	47	10	14	4	8	4	6	7	0
Granville	41	21	5	0	7	0	12	15	0
Pender	33	22	5	18	9	0	3	10	0
Hertford	39	21	19	12	5	0	1	5	0
Macon	48	14	8	11	10	0	0	4	5
Moore	58	8	11	6	11	2	0	4	0
Surry	40	7	19	8	10	4	6	6	0
All Counties	43	15	11	8	8	1	5	8	1

Considering the difference in population density between those studies reported by Clark and our data, there were many surprising similarities. Business and Industry accounted for 43% of the leadership responding in this study as compared to 52% in the studies reported by Clark. Government represented 13% of the respondents in Clark's studies while it represented only 11% in our studies. There is a rather dramatic difference in relation to Education as an occupation, 5% in Clark's studies and 15% in ours.

Community Orientation

As a measure of community orientation, the scale developed by Thomas R. Dye[2] was utilized. The respondents in this study conformed in general to to those studied by Dye. His data indicated an expected median scale score of 15. When aggregating the data from all seven counties the median score for this group was also 15. The extremes were represented by Granville County with a median score of 13 and Gaston County with a median score of 18. Four other counties, Hertford, Macon, Moore and Surry fell right at the median while Pender fell at 14, one point below the median. This suggests that in general the Gaston County leaders were somewhat more cosmopolitan in their orientation to community and the Granville leaders were somewhat more localite in their orientation than the group as a whole.

Flexibility vs Rigidity

As a measure of flexibility - rigidity, or openmindedness - closed mindedness, the Troldahl-Powell short form dogmatism scale was utilized[3].

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[2] Dye, Thomas R. "The Local-Cosmopolitan Dimension and the Study of Urban Politics." Social Forces, Vol. 41, pp239-246

[3] Troldahl, V. C. and Powell, F. A.. "A Short-Form Dogmatism Scale For Use in Field Studies". Social Forces, Vol. 44, pp 211-214

The median scale score for this group of respondents fell at 39. The possible range for scores was 10 through 60. The extremes in medians were again expressed by Granville respondents with a median of 36 and Gaston with a median of 41. Medians for Hertford, Macon and Surry fell at 40 while Surry fell at 38 and Pender at 37.

While the authors caution that this scale, as utilized in our study, should be considered only as a crude measure of Dogmatism, it does give some general insight into the "mind-set" of the respondents from these counties. The Gaston respondents appeared to be somewhat more flexible than the norm for the total group while the Granville respondents tended to be somewhat less flexible than the norm. The very fact that median scale scores for the seven counties covered only a five point range may indicate the usefulness of this measure for the purposes for which it was employed.

SECTION II

Perception Of Community Problems By Community Leaders And The General Public

Since the purpose of Project OVERVIEW is to provide information for Extension program development at the county level, the question dealing with perception of problems has been left open-ended. The interviewer simply asks "From your point of view, what are the 5 most important issues or problems facing this county?". These open-ended responses were classified by similar problem areas that have some relation to the potential for Extension programming when the data were reported. A similar coding scheme was used in all counties.

The portion of the data from the survey of the general public reported in the publication Through Our Eyes dealing with perception of community problems[4] was generated by responding to a series of 39 typical community problems and evaluating them as "Not A Serious Problem In My Community", "A Moderate Problem In My Community" or "A Serious Problem in My Community". Each of the three possible responses was given a weight and mean scores for each of the 39 items developed from the 3115 responses.

Major problems were encountered in attempts to equate data gathered from open ended questionnaires and from fixed choice questions. However, by a recoding of items we have attempted to bring some comparability to these data. We selected the 10 problem categories mentioned most often in Project OVERVIEW and have placed the items from the Through Our Eyes survey into these same categories. While the list of problem statements for OVERVIEW was

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[4] Christenson, J. A., Through Our Eyes, Volume 5: Rural-Urban Problems In North Carolina, North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Miscellaneous Publication 113, North Carolina State University at Raleigh, May, 1974

not exhaustive, it does give a strong indication of the type of problem listed in each of the problem categories. The community problems reported for Through Our Eyes accounts for all 39 items. They were compared as follows:

OVERVIEW	Through Our Eyes
EDUCATION	
Facilities	Availability of special education for retarded and handicapped
Programs	Adequacy of elementary and high schools
Staff	Availability of Kindergarten program
Services	Availability of vocational training in high schools
Adult	Adult Education Program
Vocational	
Funding	
Consolidation	
Desegregation Problems - Bussing	
PUBLIC FACILITIES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	
New or improved public buildings	Condition of streets and roads
Water Systems	Adequacy of transportation system
Sewer Systems and treatment facilities	Assistance to the old
Drainage System(s)	Availability of youth counseling services
Roads - new or improved	Assistance to the poor
Inadequate Public Transportation	Availability of child care centers
Inadequate, or need to consolidate phone system in county	Adequacy of water and sewage facilities
Welfare, including services for senior citizens	Adequacy of fire protection
Improve fire protection	
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	
Need to create jobs (labor surplus)	Employment opportunities
Need to upgrade job opportunities	Unemployment
Need to diversify employment base	Industrial development
Shortage of labor	
HEALTH CARE AND DELIVERY	
Shortage of medical personnel	Adequacy of medical facilities and staff
Shortage of medical facilities	Mental health services
Shortage of emergency treatment	
Shortage of extended care facilities	

OVERVIEW	Through Our Eyes
LONG RANGE COMMUNITY PLANNING	
Land Use Planning Zoning Subdivision Regulations Building Codes	Long Range Community Planning
HOUSING	
Need more housing - general Need low and moderate income housing Need more public housing Need more rental housing Need additional housing credit Need site development for new housing	Availability of adequate housing
RECREATION	
Need more facilities - general Need a recreation program Need more programs and facilities for specific age groups: Youth Teens Adults Senior Citizens Need to establish or activate a Recreation Commission	Recreation and entertainment facilities for those over 60 Recreation and entertainment facilities for those 21 - 60 Recreation and entertainment facilities for those under 21
LAW AND ORDER	
Increase law enforcement personnel Upgrade law enforcement personnel Need to speed up Judicial process Need to control illegal drugs Need to control illegal alcohol traffic	Use of illegal drugs Adequacy of law enforcement Protection of individual freedom and privacy
POLLUTION	
Industrial - Air and Water Agricultural - Air and Water Land - solid waste disposal Litter - general	Water Pollution Air Pollution Garbage Collection and Disposal

OVERVIEW	Through Our Eyes
GOVERNMENT	
Consolidate town-county government	Citizen participation in community decisions
Consolidate town-county government services	Willingness of people to work for the good of the community
Need to review tax policy	Community spirit and pride
Need minority group representation in government	
Limited participation in government	
Public apathy regarding government	

The 39 community problems considered in the Through Our Eyes study, for which there was no comparable OVERVIEW Problem category in the top 10, are as follows: race relations in the community which ranked 28th; cultural opportunities which ranked 29th; adequacy of libraries and museums which ranked 33rd; availability of youth organizations which ranked 38th; availability of churches which ranked 39th; adequacy of tourist facilities which ranked 32nd; and cost of living which ranked 1st[5].

A direct comparison of the ranking of the community problem categories between these two studies is indicated in Table V.

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[5]Ibid, pp 5-6

TABLE V

OVERVIEW (7 Counties) and Through Our Eyes Community Problem Ranking

Community Problem Category	OVERVIEW Rank	Through Our Eyes Rank
Education	1	10
Public Facilities, Programs and Services	2	4
Economic Development	3	9
Health Care and Delivery	4	2
Long Range Community Planning	5	3
Housing	6	5
Recreation	7	1
Law & Order	8	6
Pollution	9	7
Government	10	8

While there are some marked differences in the ranking through the two methods, there are some striking similarities as well. Some of the differences may be explained by the dominance of the more affluent among the community leader group, some by local phenomenon (in 5 of the 7 OVERVIEW Counties, a bond issue to finance local school construction was to be voted upon within a few weeks of the close of the interviewing), and others by the difference in research techniques.

As indicated, the salience of Education as a problem for Community Leaders was probably heightened by the fact of an impending bond vote in many of the counties studied. In addition, many of the community leaders were concerned with desegregation problems, a problem category not included in the Through Our Eyes study.

Similarly, the difference in Economic Development may be explained by the fact that in a number of the OVERVIEW counties, the problem had to do with a shortage of available labor as perceived by the community leaders. This is opposed to a concern for unemployment and a need for more jobs as identified in the Through Our Eyes study.

The difference in the concern for Recreation needs may be explained by the dominance of the more affluent among Community Leaders than among Household Heads. North Carolina is similar to many other southern states in that many recreation facilities are available to those who can afford to purchase memberships, but there are a lack of public recreation facilities. Consequently, the more affluent who hold memberships in private clubs may not perceive the need for public recreation facilities as highly as does the public at large as reported in Through Our Eyes.

While three problem categories differed by more than six ranks, the remaining seven differed by only one or two ranks. Some of this difference may be explained by the difference in the location of the population under study. In the Through Our Eyes study, urban residents expressed a much higher concern for the use of illegal drugs than did their rural counterparts. Since the sample for the Through Our Eyes study was drawn from the population as a whole, about half of the respondents come from urbanized areas. (About 45% of the North Carolina population resided in places with a population of 2500 or more.) However, when looking at the problems associated with government, the community leaders responding to the OVERVIEW survey were very concerned with the need for the consolidation of town-county government and/or services. There were no comparable questions phrased in the Through Our Eyes study. Consequently, when considering the different ways in which the data were gathered and coded, along with the impact of urbanization and affluence, the results are very similar.

SECTION III

Implications For Planning Purposive Social Change

As Bonnen[6] states elsewhere "Data and analysis is the life blood of the decision process". He further states "The more reliable and complete the data, the better are the resulting decisions".

The focus of both of these endeavors is to provide information for decision makers and program planners so that the resulting policy and program decisions might more effectively meet the needs of their clientele. Further, it is important that those involved in planning for purposive social change, whether they are the policy decision makers or developers of action programs, need to have a variety of information available to them when making these decisions.

Problem assessment is only one facet of developing effective programs of purposive social change. It is an ingredient that will allow the program planner to check his or her assessment of a problem with that of others - community leaders and the public at large. If their perceptions concur, the possibilities for the development of an effective program are enhanced. However, if the program planner is dealing with a problem area that has low salience for the community leader and/or the public at large the possibility of effective program implementation is greatly hampered. On the other hand, a difference of perception between the program planner and the public or community leader may be an important flag that will force the program planner to more adequately develop his or her program.

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[6]Bonnen, James T., "Rural Labor Markets and Poverty", 1972 Michigan Farm Economics Newsletter, Michigan State University, No. 353

The case of Long Range Community Planning may be considered. We reported above that community leaders rank this as the 5th most important problem while the household heads rank it as third. It is generally recognized by professionals concerned with community development planning and many top governmental officials that the need for effective long range community planning is perhaps the most important problem facing the nation today. Since there is this gulf between community leaders, the public at large and the professionals, it may indicate that before any effective movement can be generated to support a wide variety of planning, education and information programs will need to be mounted to make leadership, as well as the public at large, aware of the scope of the planning problem and the implications that may flow from the lack of planning.

Another important facet for the planner of purposive social change to consider is his clientele. Consequently, it is important that he have knowledge of the people with whom he is dealing, especially those community leaders who may enhance, or inhibit purposive social change.

In the Cooperative Extension Service we have too long viewed our rural leaders as being somewhat slow to change (except for that innovator here and there). We are living with a picture of the conservative, locally educated, hometown boy who may have been the community leader of 30 years ago. However, the data on our rural North Carolina rural community leaders are shattering this myth. We have a group of relatively young leaders (in their mid to upper 40's), who are highly educated (B.A. degree or more for 60% of them), many are relatively recent migrants to their community, and they are relatively flexible in their mind set, but they are locally oriented. This latter fact might be explained in part by the fact that many of these

community leaders have consciously chosen to live in the communities where they now reside. They weren't born there! This conscious choice has caused them to select the type of community in which they wish to reside - and therefore their relative localistic orientation may be partially explained.

While there may be differences in income, education and length of residence between the community leaders and their constituency, they, in large measure, reflect many of the attitudes of this constituency - or they would be unable to retain respect that their leadership position requires.

What does all of this mean? Simply that those who are involved in the planning of purposive social change, whether they are governmental officials, agency professionals, or citizen volunteers, need to have adequate information available to them if they are to more effectively plan for and implement their proposed programs of change. The two approaches described in this paper are but two of the ingredients the social change planner should have available. It is also important that the social change planner be able to understand and adequately interpret any variations in the data that might result from varying research strategies. Finally, the social change planner must have an accurate assessment of his clientele - so that he can more effectively develop his change project to capitalize upon the strengths of his clientele, and supplement any weaknesses that they may have.